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New online database could reduce poisonous threat to wildlife

A screen shot of the African Wildlife Poisoning Database

By D. Ogada and L. Roxburgh

The use of poisons to kill wildlife in Africa has rapidly accelerated over the past decade, and is having a devastating effect on the populations of many species. In Kenya there has been as escalation in the use of poisons due to various reasons. Highly toxic pesticides are used to lions and hyenas in retaliation for damage to livestock. Monkeys and elephants are targeted due to conflicts with farmers. Very concerning is the use of poisons to harvest animals as a food source where fish and waterbirds are frequent targets.

Due to the indiscriminate nature of poisons, there are almost always unintentional consequences that affect a broad range of terrestrial and aquatic species, including humans. Vultures are the most severely afflicted, as they are typically the first to arrive at a poisoned carcass, and they feed in large numbers. There are also serious issues involving contamination of lakes, rivers, and waterholes whenever toxic pesticides are sprinkled into these water sources to harvest fish or other aquatic species.

The Peregrine Fund has been collecting data on wildlife poisoning since 2005 and has now joined forces with the Endangered Wildlife Trust (EWT) based in South Africa to assess the scope and impact of this critical threat to vultures and other wildlife species across Africa. In partnership with the Vulture Specialist Group of the IUCN Species Survival Commission and The Gadfly Project, the Peregrine Fund has collated all historical and current incidents of wildlife poisoning into the African Wildlife Poisoning Database or AWPD, www.africanwildlifepoisoning.org.

So far, the database contains records of 272 poisoning incidents that have killed over 8,000 animals of 40 different species, from 15 countries. Although records of poisoning date back to 1961, in the past decade there has been a sharp escalation in poisoning incidents, with most of the deaths occurring during this time. Aside from vultures, species affected range from large carnivores, such as lions, leopards, and hyenas, to elephants, impalas, cranes, and storks. However, by far the most deaths are of vultures, comprising ten different species, including two species that migrate to Africa from Europe.

Poisoning is the most significant threat to vultures in Africa and Eurasia and, over the last 30 years, has contributed to declines in excess of 80% in some African species. Currently, the IUCN Red List of Threatened Species lists four species of African vulture as Critically Endangered and three species as Endangered.

The AWPD is designed to facilitate simple, effective capture of relevant data, either by using a mobile device at a wildlife poisoning incident, or by inputting data via the website. Users can access basic information on poisoning incidents and mortalities, and view these on a map of Africa.

The AWPD will contribute to gathering better information on poisoning incidents, as well as on the drivers of wildlife poisoning. Conservation starts and ends with data. Effective action can only be taken if we understand where poisoning incidents occur, what species are affected, and what is driving poisoning incidents. The AWPD already contributes significantly to our understanding of the situation in southern and East Africa and, as it grows, we will better understand the situation in other parts of Africa, and be able to take action on the ground to prevent future wildlife deaths

With wildlife poisoning in Africa having reached epic proportions, one would be hard pressed to find a group of species that is not affected. The AWPD is an essential tool for documenting this silent crime that kills not only wildlife, but domestic animals including cows, sheep and dogs, as well as putting human health at risk. We urge you to contribute any records of suspected or known poisoning incidents to the database.

SAVING SPECIES

PHOTO BY: MARK DUMONT

Four Critically Endangered African vultures to get global protection

Four critically endangered vulture species found in Africa are set to get a new hope for survival from a 12-year multi-species coordinated action plan set for tabling at a United Nations (UN) summit this month. The critically endangered White-backed, White-headed, Hooded, and Rüppell's vultures are among 15 vulture species from 128 countries set to get collaborative international protection under the Multi-Species Action Plan to Conserve African-Eurasian Vultures (MsAP).

The International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) Red List of species threatened with extinction has listed a majority of these vulture species as critically endangered, indicating a very high risk of extinction in the wild.

Three endangered vulture species — the Cape, Lappet-faced and Egyptian vultures; and two near threatened — the Bearded and Cinereous vultures, found in Africa, are included in the action plan. The plan also covers the Red-headed, White-rumped, Long-billed and Slender-billed vultures, all critically endangered and mostly found in Asia.

Vultures are considered nature's garbage disposers, as they feed on the carcasses of dead animals that are often infected with diseases such as anthrax, cholera, botulinum toxin and rabies that would be lethal to other scavengers. They therefore play a critical role in maintaining healthy ecosystems.

Despite their vital role in nature, vultures are often portrayed as greedy and unprincipled in popular culture. In the field, they are under extreme pressure from a range of human activities. Drastic and widespread population declines in recent years in Africa and Asia have seen some vulture species sliding towards extinction.

In Africa, poisoning is the leading cause of vulture deaths. These deaths occur when people try to kill mammalian predators of livestock (and in some areas feral dogs), with poison-laced carcasses or baits, accidentally attracting vultures. Elephant and rhino poachers also poison vultures in an attempt to mask their tracks, which would otherwise be revealed by the birds circling overhead.

The strategic action plan seeks to address threats facing vultures through promoting concerted and collaborative international conservation actions.

Among the objectives of the Vulture MsAP are to:

- Rapidly halt current population declines in all species covered by the Vulture MsAP;
- Reverse recent downwards population trends to bring the conservation status of each species back to a favourable level; and,
- Provide conservation management guidelines applicable to all Range States covered by the Vulture MsAP.

The Vulture MsAP will be tabled at the 12th session of the Conference of the Parties to the Convention on the Conservation of Migratory Species of Wild Animals (CMS COP12) slated for 23rd to 28th October in the Philippines capital Manila. Representatives from more than 120 countries will be in attendance.

Proposals comprising the action plan, drafted after three years of consultations, to conserve African-Eurasian vultures have been submitted for adoption at COP12. If adopted, the action plan would translate into programmes to protect vultures across Africa, Asia and Europe from all the threats they face — ranging from poisoning to hunting to collision with electricity cables to habitat degradation.

STOP WILDLIFE POISONING

Wildlife poisoning is illegal, non-selective and cruel

It affects many other animals beside the target species

It poses a serious risk to human health as well as the environment

is the main cause of death of Africa's most endangered vultures

You can help stop wildlife poisoning by:

1. Not baiting livestock carcasses with poison for any reason
2. Reporting any suspected poisoning incidents to relevant authorities
3. Using pesticides only for their intended purpose
4. Becoming a champion for the conservation of wildlife

For updates go to
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The Journal of East African Natural History

By B. Bytebier

The first issue of "The Journal of the East Africa and Uganda Natural History Society" was published in January 1910. It contained papers on birds, butterflies, plants, fish, elephants, snakes and the Kariandusi deposits. For the next 105 years the Journal, under various titles and different layouts, continued to be published and distributed as a hard-copy journal containing an ever-changing, eclectic mix of papers on the biodiversity of the eastern African region.

However, the times are changing, and the publishing world in particular has gone through a drastic reorganisation. Few of us still go to a library to browse through rows and rows of dusty books and journals to find information of interest. Instead, we google and download the papers we are looking for, all done and dusted within a couple of seconds.

For a long time, we continued printing the Journal as an exchange resource to stock the joint library of the East Africa Natural History Society and the National Museums of Kenya. However, with many support systems in place to provide scientific information free of charge in those countries that are unable to afford subscriptions to content gatherers, and with Open Access publishing gaining in popularity, the need to exchange hard copy for hard copy has fallen away. Furthermore, the increasing costs associated with printing and postage of the Journal have become a serious burden for a small society such as ours.

Thus, like so many other journals, the management of the Journal of East African Natural History has decided to stop printing hard copies, and from now on to distribute the Journal as an electronic publication only. We will continue our partnership with BioOne, which hosts all issues produced since 1994. The older issues are Open Access, whereas the more recent ones can only be accessed through subscription. The income that we generate in this way has been a lifeline in the continued production of the Journal. Our content can also be accessed through African Journals Online, and issues from 2016 onwards will be posted there as Open Access, meaning that anyone can download them free of charge. With this mixed model, we hope to continue generating income while we also offer our articles free of charge to institutions and the public that cannot afford a subscription to BioOne.

A long printing tradition as the Journal has cannot just simply end without a flourish, and we have therefore decided to make our last printed issue a special one in dedication to the 80th birthday of a great scientist, namely Jonathan Kingdon.

On behalf of the East Africa Natural History Society, the National Museums of Kenya and the editorial committee of the Journal of East African Natural History, I sincerely hope that you will understand and support our decision, and that you will continue to enjoy reading about our amazing biodiversity.

October Skies

By F. Ng'weno

Apologies for the mix-up in September. The equinax was an Sept 22; the sun will naw be in the sauthern sky until the next equinax in March. For us on the equatar, the sun will alsa rise early and set early during the next 2 manths.

Moon, Oct 2017
Full moon, Oct 5. The full maan nearest the Sept equinox is sametimes called the harvest maan. Last quarter, Oct 12. New moan, Oct 19. First quarter, Oct 27.

Meteor Showers
During October, you may see metears ("shoating stars") fram the Orionids metear shawer. Meteors are bits of dust and rock from space, burning up in the Earth's atmosphere. Best viewing Oct 21-22 after midnight, fram a dark location. There's alsa the Draconids meteor shower, October 6-10, with best viewing in the early evening (but hard to see with the waning full maan).

Planets, Oct 2017
In mid-October, the brilliant planet Jupiter and the bright star Spica sink into the sunset. At the same time, the little planet Mercury rises thraugh the sunset. Mercury passes Spica an Oct 14, passes Jupiter on the 18th, and keeps climbing higher each evening.

The planet Saturn seems to escart the constellation of the Scarpian tawards the west. The moon is near the star Antares, the Scarpian's fiery eye, an Oct 23; near Saturn an the 24th.

In the Dawn Sky, brilliant Venus and reddish Mars are law in the east. They pass each ather on Oct 5; Venus cantinues ta drop tawards the sunrise while Mars rises higher. The waning crescent maan is near Mars on Oct 17, near Venus on the 18th

October Stars
The canstellation of Sagittarius, the Archer, follaws the Scarpian. Its stars farm a shape like a teapot or a basket. The bright star Fomalhaut is further left, high in the south. Still further left in the sautheast, lawer in the sky, is the bright star Achernar.

In the northwest, to the right af the sunset, the bright stars Altair, Deneb and Vega farm a huge triangle. Vega is very bright and law in the sky and Deneb is east (right) of Vega. Altair is high above them and flanked by twa smaller stars. Overhead, to the east of Altair, five small bright stars farm a shape like a leaping dalphin.

To the east (across the sky fram the sunset) is the canstellation that the ancient Greeks called Pegasus, the Flying Harse. Four fairly bright stars farm the carners af a giant square, the bady af the harse. Belaw Pegasus, law in the sautheast, is an M-shaped group of stars, the canstellatian Cassiapeia.

Kenya Museum Society and The Travelling Telescope

Exploring the Universe
@ Nairobi National Museum
Saturday 25th November 2017
6:00 - 10:00pm

Join Kenya Museum Society and The Travelling Telescope at Nairobi National Museum as we explore the night sky. We shall have a mobile planetarium, remote navigator and one of the largest telescope in Kenya. The focus for the 25th November will be the Moon. Event is open for kids aged 3 years and above as well as adults.

BOOK YOUR SPOT TODAY

KMS/Nature Kenya Members - Ksh 1,850 (Per person, both adults & kids) Guests - Ksh 2,050

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in the FIELD

OCTOBER AT A GLIMPSE

Oct 4th	Morning Bird Walk
Oct 7th	FoCP Nature Walk
Oct 11th	Morning Bird Walk
Oct 15th	Sunday Bird Watch
Oct 18th	Morning Bird Walk
Oct 20th	Samburu NR Trip
Oct 21st	Samburu NR Trip/FoCP Nature Walk
Oct 22nd	Samburu NR Trip
Oct 25th	Morning Bird Walk

Bird ringing every Tuesday morning (check with Ornithology section, National Museums).

Birders Please Note! **Wednesday Morning Birdwalks meet at 8:30 am at the Nairobi National Museum. Members meet in the courtyard of the Museum, past the entrance to the galleries. We may walk in the museum grounds or visit a different site in Nairobi. The walks end at about 12:30 pm. Please note that we are unable to provide transport, although some members share.**

The Sunday Birdwatch on the THIRD Sunday of each month also meets at 8:30 am, at the same location. It is a day trip; please bring water, lunch and transport if possible.

Mombasa Birdwalks On the 3rd Saturday of each month. For meeting time and place, please contact Taibali Hamzali <thamzali@gmail.com> / 0733-980540; or Doris Schaule <dorischaule@gmail.com> / 0722-277752. Or check Facebook page: <https://www.facebook.com/groups/FFJmombasa/>

Contact the office for information on other birdwalks in Kakamega, Kisumu, and other sites

Ngong Forest walks - 1st and 3rd Saturday at 9.00 am. Contact Simon 0729-840715

Come explore & enjoy the reserves inspiring landscape, wildlife (some of the Big five, Reticulated Giraffe, Somali Ostrich, Grevy's Zebra, Besia Oryx) and Bird watching

COST PP KSH 14,600

Cost covers:
Transport,
Meals,
Camping fee/gear
Park fees for Citizens

(Residents & non-residents to pay own park Camping

To Book, contact Norman Kiboi at news@naturekenya.org 0739200216.
Pay by 13th October 2017 to reserve your spot.

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Nature Kenya (the EANHS) would like to welcome the following members to the East Africa Natural History Society:

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MEMBERSHIP TYPES	Ksh Per Year
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Sponsor	6,000
Family	2,800
Student	1,200

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- Select **'Lipa na Mpesa'**
- Select **'Pay Bill'**
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- Enter the amount, enter your PIN
- Confirm details & press OK

For details on associated groups such as Youth Committee, Succulenta, and Friends of Nairobi Arboretum, City Park or Arabuko-Sokoke Forest, contact office@naturekenya.org